Fires That Have Burned Out

By Elsie Endicott

THERE are few legitimate reasons for divorce, according to my way of thinking," said Natalie Thurston, failing to see her hostess' signal to steer the conversation into less dangercus channels. "If married people keep their heads, there is always a possible solution of any human problem. Do you agree, Mr. Planchard?" she asked the brilliantly successful civil engineer, who had recently undertaken a big piece of construction work near the city.

"Divorce is a very debatable subject," he answered, enigmatically.

"In a great many cases divorce is caused by the fickleness of women," said Tony McClure. "They are restless. They want new emotions. Why, even old mother Eve left father Adam to listen to the wiles of the devil," laughed Tony. "I am a bahelcor because I am afraid that I am not clever enough to hold the slippery affection of any lady fair."

"Judging by your remarks," interposed Mabel Needham, "the woman is always to blame. You are narrow-minded, Tony."

"Well, a woman can do whatever she pleases with a man, and you know it," said Tony, warmly.

"There is one thing that I do know. If every woman knew a man like you there would be more old maids like I am in the world and fewer unhappy married women."

"You're not an old maid," argued Tony. "You're just the right age, old enough to have some sense."

"If you two are not careful, we will be buying your wedding presents within a year," said the pretty, generous young widow, who had made her home among them for three years.

Tony grinned cheerfully at her. "You can say the nicest things, Mrs. Wallace. If it were not for Mabel now, I would propose to you." He winked openly at Ned Planchard, for the young engineer had evidently fallen in love with Lenore Wallace on sight. She treated him as she did all other men. She was pleasantly agreeable, nothing more. Only her hostess at the dinner table knew that she was not a real widow, merely the often abused "divorced woman" who had taken her maiden name.

When dinner was over and the men lingering for a while over their liquors and cigars had finally gone in search of the women, Ned Planchard looked vainly around the drawing room for Lenore Wallace. A French window opened on the terrace and through it he caught a sight of a white gown fluttering outside.

Before him stretched a flower garden where delicately tinted cosmos, dahlias and late roses still courageously flaunted their blossoms, although there was a hint of early frost in the air. He followed Lenore down a winding gravel path to a stone bench before a fountain where the falling water dropped like sparkling jewels in the moonlight.

"Warm enough?" he asked, sitting down beside her. Somewhat clumsily he pulled the armine stole she wore closer around her bare shoulders.

She did not answer him. Her eyes were on the flowers around her, flowers whose fragrant petals were drifting down at every little breeze that rippled over the garden.

"I am in love with you. You know—you must have seen—"

"Don't!" she exclaimed wearily. Then, after a pause, "Each of us has the capacity for one great passion in life. When that has been dissipated, there is nothing left but the ashes of a burned out fire. When they were innocently discussing divorce at the table tonight, I wanted to cry out, 'How can you argue questions of which you know nothing. I have been through the mill. There are scars burned into my flesh—"

"Tell me," whispered Ned Planchard, "tell me, did you love as deeply as that?"

She turned to him, her face wan in the moonlight. "For three years I have smiled at the world, a new world into which I forced myself, far from the scenes of my one time happiness. But through it all my heart has been maimed and crushed, like a bird with broken wings that struggles valiantly, yet vainly, to fly again. To forget is impossible. Someone has wisely said that a man disappointed in love locks that room in his heart dear to the old love and throws away the key, but a woman brushes the cobwebs from the door and returns again and again, to dream the old dreams."

"I love you, Lenore," he said, lifting her hand to his lips. "I love you. I swear that I will live to make you happy."

"You!" she cried accusingly. "You, who took my happiness away! Oh, the irony of life, that you should come to me, after all these years and say, 'I love you.' Why Ned, you don't know what love means."

He caught her in his arms and held her head against his throbbing heart. "I have been utterly miserable every minute since I let you go, Lenore. We were young, foolish, inexperienced—" me then. Now that you have achieved success, gratified your ambition, reached your goal—"

"I agonized for a fading crown," he told her sadly. "I wanted to work—work for you, of course, and you thought that I neglected you for a whim, a mere selfish purpose to advance myself in my profession. Girl, dear," he lapsed into old lover-like endearments, "when a man finds the one woman, he longs to succeed to lay his laurels at her feet. We quarrelled about it once. Let's begin all over again! Success is nothing, life is nothing—without you!"

He released her abruptly and leaned forward, head in his hands. The arrogant, selfishly important boy she had loved was gone. A man, sadly wise and utterly lonely, was there in his place. Motherhood, long denied, stirred in her heart, the heart that she had schooled herself to believe could hold only the dust of her youthful dreams.

"Of course," he said in a tone that brought a lump to her throat and a mist of tears to blur her eyes. "I can't expect you to come back to me. I have made what the world calls success, but it is gall and wormwood without you."

"And if I come back to you?" she whispered breathlessly.

The sweet humility in the eyes he lifted, the gentleness in his touch as he held her in his arms again, told more eloquently than words how much he really loved her. "Your little world will claim you. Tony McClure says that half the men here are in love with you," he began jealously. "Can I make you happy?"

"A bird whose wings have been broken never tries to fly high nor far, Ned, dear," she said softly.

He Made It a Binding Contract

By Phil Moore

HELP! Murder! The police!" exclaimed Fossett, disgustedly, as he rejoined Mr. and Mrs. Dan Dugan on the hotel porch. "Forrest's goin' to lay over in this hole another day. I knew no good would come in bookin' this tank route. We ought to be back at the Olympia and good old Broadway. I'm dyin' of dry rot in this dump." And he plumped himself into a willow rocker despondently.

Mrs. Dan Dugan, otherwise known and publicly billed the night before at the opera house as Bates, of Fossett, Dugan and Bates, "Those Different Dancers," grinned and patted Fossett on the knee.

"Hold in there, Bill," she admonished. "It'll do your system a powerful lot of good to miss the giddy going for another day. Let's have a little game, Nix, never, no," protested Fossett, positively. "I'm going to get the eol man and go down Main street and kid the rubes a bit." He rose, yawned loudly and ambled into the lobby. Tacking over to the cigar stand, where Forrest was critically hunting for a familiar smoke, he deliberately diverted the attention of the young girl from Forrest.

"Miss, where's any excitement?" he asked, leaning over the case with a friendly smile.

"I beg your pardon," she replied, innocently. "What do you mean?"

"Just this," he persisted. "This gentleman here has sentenced me to another day's exile from my native heath, which is a broad concrete thoroughfare spoken of often as Broadway. I wish to keep the sunny smile and amuse myself. So the best little thing you can do for this tired business man, which is me, is to tell me where I can be amused tonight. Me and my rural friend, Mr. Forrest, here."

Forrest, having dined luxuriously over the first chemically pure fried chicken he'd had for a year, and feeling in a good humor, chuckled. The girl, however, felt a little nettled over Fossett's manner, feeling in some instinctively way that he was "joshing" her. "I don't know whether it would interest you or not," she replied with icy sweetness, but there's a little entertainment down at the Baptist Church tonight. Even you might enjoy it."

Fossett winced, while Forrest gave him a sharp dig in the midrib.

"Score one for the little lady," shouted Forrest. "She's called you, Pete."

Fossett grinned sheepishly.

"I guess you're right," he admitted, with a laugh. "Buy yourself that big box of chocolates and charge it to me, little girl. I'm stung.

"Come on, Pete," urged Forrest. "Let's take in the big show. Let's go now and get a front seat." And he grasped Fossett's arm and led him away.

Five minutes later they were in the jostling holiday-bedecked throng in front of the church. Neither was recognized, for Fossett's makeup the night before had laborately concealed his features, while Forrest was only the manager, and therefore not previously in evidence. They ensconced themselves comfortably in two seats well front, and managed to take a snickering interest in the first part of the program, similar as it was, in every respect, to the average of its kind. Then the Sunday-chool superintendent, an important little man with impressive "sideboards" and officiously acting as stage manager, call-boy, stage carpenter, electrician and stage hand, authoritatively assumed unto himself the additional splendor of announcing that "the next feature (accentuating the last syllable) on our program will be Miss Fannie Thompson, of whom we are all so proud." He further explained, to Fossett's glee, that she was the rival of any "per-fessional singer on the stage." He retired reluctantly, and Miss Fannie Thompson appeared. Fossett, expectantly awaiting "Silver Threads Among the Gold" by a limpid soprano of doubtful age, sat up with a start.

"Great guns!" he whispered, hoarsely, to Forrest, "but she's a winner?" Forrest, however, made no answer, for as the orchestra swung into the opening strains of a late popular hit, and the girl started to sing, he sat as if dazed. Where in the name of Heaven did that girl come from? such personality, and such winsome vivacity! At the conclusion of her act, Forrest, silently and dreamily, grasped Fossett's arm and led him to the street. Once outside, Forrest turned to Fossett with a look of wonder.

"Man alive!" he cried, "that girl's a knockout. Why, she'll fill the Olympia to standin'-room. She's a find. I'm going to book her up."

"Wake up, you're asleep," ridiculed Fossett. "Why, there ain't a chance of you coaxing her away from here. But I've got to hand it to you, she's a wonder. And pretty, well—I think I'll stay over a while."

The next morning Forrest got the address of Miss Thompson from the cigar clerk, and, accompanied by Fossett, who had been impatiently trying to get the manager started for upwards of two hours, they departed for the Thompson home.

They were graciously received, but their proposition met with a decided chill. "Playactin'" asserted Mother Thompson, was all right in its place, but she didn't want her girl to be an actress. They coaxed and pleaded, but to no avail. Fossett, however, by his power of persuasion, and helped by his really likable self, that Fannie wasn't long in finding out, gained in her a possible ally to their plans. He whispered to her that he would probably be in town a week, and drew for himself an nvitation to dine the following evening. Once outside, Forrest shook his head dejectedly.

"It's a durn shame!" he complained. "She'd be a great card. Well I guess we'll go back tonight without her."

"There, there," soothed Pete, "don't give up. Look here, I'm going to stay here a while longer. Maybe I can land her."

A week later Forrest received the following telegram:

"Thompson is coming with me tomorrow. Bill her with Fossett, Dugan and Bates. PETE."

Forrest's brow wrinkled. It would be a great fizzle to bill her up in the papers and then have her desert him. So he shot back another wire to Fossett: "Are you sure she'll stick?"

The answer was brief, but convincing: "She ought to. She promised me before a preacher."

How He Helped Matters Along

By Abner Anthony

NANEEN cherished no illusions about the smart set after the formal dinner that had ushered in the gaities for the house party of which she was the only insignificant member. She had been private secretary to Mr. Munsen, of Munsen Company and Son, for two years, when the Munsens began planning an elaborate week-end entertainment at their country place for a group of their son's friends, and to her pleasant surprise, she found herself included in their list of guests.

On receiving the invitation, Naneen spent one entire Saturday afternoon buying the frivolous things for which she had never before had any need. The first evening at the Munsens she had dressed herself carefully, her young heart beating high with the thought that she was to associate for three whole days with the cultured sons and daughters of the city's richest men.

Her disillusionment came very swiftly. Two of the girls drank so much wine at dinner that they had to be carried upstairs by servants and almost every man was too utterly foolish to carry on any sort of conversation. This was the life, then, that she had read about and envied, considered Naneen thoughtfully, as she looked around the room at the girls, lounging indolently on chairs and divans, puffing at cigarettes.

It was quite early the next morning when, in a chic serge suit and stout brown walking-boots, Naneen availed herself of her hostess' suggestion to get up and look over the farm a bit if she did not like to sleep late. She found her pleasant employer and his good-looking son at breakfast. Both men rose quickly, greeting her cordially, and she experienced her first real pleasure at the much anticipated house party while she sat at the table with them. She announced her intention of taking a brisk walk, whereupon the younger Munsen asked to accompany her. While he was gone upstairs to get into a pair of high boots, her old employer aimed a broadside at her.

"You met Miss Betty Calloway last night, didn't you?" he began lazily, "Charming girl! I don't mind telling you—" here he leaned confidently toward her—"I want Don to marry her. Truth of the matter is—I have reason to believe that they are already engaged."

"Indeed!" said Naneen looking the old man steadily in the eye. She felt the blood flame into her face. Her employer was taking care to see that she read the "No poaching" sign on his handsome son. She made a few agreeable remarks, touched on the weather, the beauty of the meadows seen from the breakfast room window, and commented with rare good judgment on his prize stock that she had noticed the day before when she came down. Then she excused herself and went swinging off down a gravel path between rows of early tulips. To her surprise, she encountered Bob Mayfield at the end of the path.

"I've been here watching for you for an hour. You certainly made a hit with me last night." He caught her arm and turned toward a little knoll beyond which an orchard offered a paradise of drifting loom.

Naneen breathed deeply and threw out her arms in a gesture of happy abandon. To her astonishment, Bob Mayfield put an arm around her carelessly. "Come on, you pretty thing," he drawled quietly, "I'm going to kiss you. You've got me going."

Naneen was quick as a flash. A business girl knows well enough how to protect herself without making a scene. When she had told young Mayfield, who was a millionaire's son and therefore considered himself a privileged character, just what she thought of him and his kind, she whirled blindly into the orchard. There she found an old seat built around a gnarled apple tree and she dropped down on it, her knees trembling so that she was glad to rest for a minute.

"You ran away from me, didn't you?" Don Munsen sat down beside her. Then soberly. "I heard every word you said to Mayfield. I wanted to thrash him within an inch of his life, but if he has an ounce of gray matter, he won't need anything but a telegram calling him away from here today. You're a very wonderful girl—to me, Naneen."

If there is one thing that hurts a girl more than anything else in life, it is to have the man with whom she is in love and who is ostensibly not for her, compliment her. For two years, every time Don Munsen had entered his father's private office, Naneen had felt that all of the blood in her body was beating in her small ears. Every time she had heard him call some girl over the telephone to make engagements, she had wanted to scream, but instead, because she was a clever girl who always used her head, she had never by the flickering of an eyelid let him know what he mattered to her any more than the old janitor. One day, just a week or two before the house party, he had brought her a bunch of violets. She had been so overwhelmed, so utterly hapy that she was almost speechless, but she had been able to thank him perfunctorily and to keep right on typing, as if her salary depended on getting that sheet through the machine with all speed. She had known that she was playing with fire when she accepted an invitation to his home, but when a girl is just twenty-two, pretty, in love, and the year is at the spring—what can one expect even if she is clever enough to always use her head.

"Isn't it lovely here," she asked quite composedly, veering the conversation away from the unpleasant episode, "the sunshine on the apple trees, the birds darting in and out—we are very far from the office today, aren't we?"

"I wanted to kick Mayfield for putting his arm around you a while ago, but if you don't turn here and let me tell you how much I love you—"

A bird seemed to be singing in her heart. Naneen's breath came fast, unevenly—then memory stabbed her fleeting happiness with recollection of her employer's statement at breakfast about Betty Calloway.

"I—I can't listen." She jumped up and turned quickly from him only to encounter his father, who had planted himself squarely in the way.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"She doesn't—care," said Don.

Naneen could not endure the pain in his voice so she looked up at him, her eyes blurred with tears. "Your father told me that you were engaged to Betty Calloway—"

"Why, Dad, yo—you"

The senior Munsen took a very small, cold hand and patted it as he placed it in his son's hand, eagerly stretched out to clasp it. "You see," he explained, "I wanted to help Don along—you've never even appeared to notice him in the office and so I thought, perhaps, you would think better of him if some other girl seemed to want him."

Naneen smiled radiantly at him. "Why, I suppose every girl wants Don," she said with the world old conceit of the species over the male who happens to pause when he passes her way.

Putting Him Through the Test

By Joella Johnson

I LOVE you better than anything in the world," said Henry Forbes as he pressed a kiss upon the lips of the girl who had just accepted him.

It was a balmy summer evening. Myra McKean was like a girl in a fairy story.

Once again he crushed her to him. It seemed as if he were kissing each one of her silky brown curls. Then espying some one just entering the Italian portola at the other end of the garden, he suddenly released his newly acquired possession and he and Myra hastened toward the portola. Myra's father and mother were seated there. And it was with a joyous triumphant ring in Henry's voice he told of the engagement, adding at the end, "With your consent, of course."

"There isn't a more ideal young man anywhere," Mr. McKean had often said to Myra's mother during the many days Henry had courted Myra, and Mrs. McKean had always agreed with him without a moment's hesitancy, although in her own quiet moments she sometimes fell to wondering—and then she would suddenly stop and chide herself for being so intense in analyzing one's character.

The next evening it was a very enthusiastic young man who ran up the steps of the exclusive bachelor club of Detroit to tender his resignation. And it was with a new and firmer grip he extened his hand in response to that of his best chum, Willard Lawrence, when that honorary member wished him the best in the world.

"But tell me," began Willard in his quizzical way when they had seated themselves on the open balcony of the clubhouse, "how in the world did you come to choose little Myra McKean when there were so many other girls at your heels?"

"Seriously?" asked Henry as he reached for his high ball on the wicker tray at the side of the big easy chair he was slouching into.

"Why, yes—was there really a reason deeper than the lure of her pretty brown curls and big violet eyes?"

"Indeed there was," Henry said decidedly. "You've always known my pet ideas of heredity, haven't you?"

"Well, that's it. You see, I believe that environment plays no part whatsoever with a human being. It's all in the blood, Laury, and although all the other girls I know were perfect ladies with charming manners, somehow I always found their finesse had been acquired and never been born in them. That's what has made all the difference in the world. It's the parents of a girl I consider in choosing a wife—not the girl herself so much, for you know the old scientific law is that character always skips a generation and—" Henry suddenly realized he had said enough for Willard to understand his point. He settled back again into his big chair and struck a match to his cigar.

"You might be right, old boy," remarked Willard lightly, "but I don't think I could be so scientific about loving. If I loved a girl that's all there'd be to it, I'm afraid." But Henry held his own opinion and shook his head in decided disagreement.

One afternoon when Henry was playing bridge with Myra in the great drawing room of the McKean mansion, Mrs. McKean called Henry aside on some pretext or other and escorted him to her private room.

"Henry," she began a little solemnly, "I have something to tell you before you marry Myra. I think, now that you are about to become her husband and will hold her future in your hands, you ought to know that she is not our child."

Henry's face went a ghastly white. Mrs. McKean noted it, but continued: "She was left on our front step twenty years ago, a little bundle of pink life, and we took her in and raised her as our own." Mrs. McKean arose as though her confession was over, much to her relief. Henry walked silently out of the room just behind Mrs. McKean like a body whose soul had flown.

Then the next morning Henry arose. He was a new man with a new light in his eyes. He went to Mrs. McKean and told her Myra's birth made no difference to him whatever. "I love her beyond all worldly interference, and, although my plan has always been a little different—love knows no law—and Myra shall be my wife just the same."

A few weeks later, just as the last strains of the wedding march died down and the multitudes of people began to crowd out of the door of the church after the bride was flitted away in a palatial car to the McKean home, Mrs. McKean leaned back into the cushions of her coupe and laughed merrily. "So glad," she said half aloud, "so glad it's the real thing. I had my doubts. I must get to him at once."

Mrs. McKean cornered Henry in an alcove of the reception robm just after they had received the guests in due formality.

"Henry, my son," she said softly, a light of affection in her eyes, "it isn't so at all. She is our baby—little Myra. I was just testing you to find out how much you really did love her. Willard had told me your ideas of life, and I experimented on your love with the acid test. Will you forgive me" she asked sweetly.

And Henry, taking her soft, smooth face between his hands, kissed her reverently.

"But wait till I get Willard," he grinned, rushing off in his direction.